

Girls and gangs in Central America: reflections from the field

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The subject of this PhD research is the role of women in and around gangs in Central America. Our main research question is 'What is the role and agency of girls/women in and around gangs?'. For this research we implement a qualitative methodology, starting from an Informed Grounded Theory perspective, conducting (in-depth) interviews as well as focus groups and (participatory) observations. The study involves several field researches: one three-month exploratory field research (March – May 2017), and two six-month in-depth field researches (2018 & 2019). After the exploratory field research we decided to focus on Honduras. We will discuss the reason of this choice, along with other experiences from the field. During the exploratory field research over 30 interviews were conducted, as well as focus groups and observations. Notwithstanding the focus of this preliminary research was on experts in the field, we also had the opportunity to visit female and male prisons, talk to (former) gang members, and participate (as observers) in some activities with youngsters/prisoners/(ex) gang members. Although the traditional male-female roles (as experienced in the region) can also be retrieved within the gang, women are likewise involved in criminal activities such as extortion, drug and weapon trafficking, and assassination.